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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KABUL 002714

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SUBJECT: KARZAI'S INEFFECTIVE PARLIAMENTARY OUTREACH

REF: A. KABUL 2595

[1](#)B. KABUL 2245

[1](#)C. KABUL 2175

Classified By: CDA Christopher Dell for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Last month's overrides of presidential vetoes highlight President Karzai's difficult relationship with the National Assembly's Lower House. Several factors contribute to Karzai's poor track record in achieving his legislative goals, including his refusal to form a political party, MPs' inability to formalize their own voting blocs, and the failure of parliament to hold frequent contested votes and record the outcomes. Somewhat unexpectedly, Karzai's poor relationship with the legislative branch stems not from a strong opposition, but instead from a failure to effectively organize his natural supporters, including more than 100 ethnic Pashtun MPs. Karzai's own view of parliament as subservient to the presidency and Cabinet likely discourages him from engaging MPs more directly. The president's disengagement from the National Assembly has weakened this young institution at the heart of Afghan representative democracy.

Veto Overrides Show Unorganized Outreach Effort

[1](#)2. (C) In early September, Lower House Speaker Yunus Qanooni (Kabul, Tajik) surprised the administration by quickly holding votes on several bills vetoed during the last legislative session (ref A). Qanooni easily gathered the required two-thirds majorities necessary to override the president's vetoes. These legislative defeats revealed a growing gap between Karzai and a broad swath of MPs once thought to be natural allies. Although Karzai has assigned one of his closest allies -- Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Farooq Wardak -- to manage relations with legislators, he has few MPs he can turn to for support in the Lower House, and no one bloc willing to consistently advance legislation he favors or stop initiatives he opposes.

[1](#)3. (C) Karzai has long refused to create a political party or endorse an existing political group. As a result of the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) system of electing MPs, parliament is filled mainly by independents or those with only superficial or frequently changing loyalties to usually ethnic-based parties. Karzai and Wardak have occasionally reached out to individual MPs for support on individual

issues, but many MPs say the outreach is not centered on any legislative or ideological strategy. Deputy Speaker Mirwais Yasini (Nangarhar, Pashtun) said he speaks with Karzai and Wardak frequently about nominations of Cabinet members and other high-ranking officials before the Lower House, but rarely discusses legislation. Although many think of him as Karzai's highest-ranking backer in the Lower House, Yasini is just as likely to criticize Karzai as support him in conversations with embassy officers -- a common trait among so-called Karzai loyalists in parliament. Although these MPs have natural or historical reasons to support the president -- tribal or familial connections, shared experiences with the West, or common rivalries with warlords -- many express disappointment with Karzai's administrative skills and failure to address corruption or make good on political appointment promises.

¶4. (C) Furthering Karzai's poor relations with MPs, Qanooni runs the Lower House as a foil to the executive branch and has invested more energy, via his United Front coalition, into assembling an opposition bloc than in leading the business of the Lower House. In order to maintain his grip on the Lower House's agenda, he keeps hours short and ends sessions early when divisive rhetoric boils over. Bills languish in committees few MPs attend and the house's leadership often defers difficult decisions to non-parliamentary commissions (refs B and C). Thus, parliament rarely holds close votes that would ordinarily encourage MPs to self-identify with factions and allow a more predictable measurement of pro- and anti-government forces.

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#### Survey of Political Parties Shows Little Organized Support for Karzai

¶5. (C) Wardak told PolOff recent efforts by Karzai to reach out to Lower House MPs, particularly concerning the legalization of foreign forces, has improved relations between Karzai and parliament. Still, conversations with MPs and parliament watchers reveal few MPs willing to go on the record with their support for Karzai. Wardak himself refused to name his most dependable parliamentary allies, insisting he had no "chief whip" to count votes in the Lower House. Despite concerted efforts by MPs to publicly distance themselves from Karzai, we identified the following factions as occasional or past sources of support for Karzai inside parliament:

-- Pashtun-centric Parties. MPs allied with Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan (HIA) and Afghan Millat, parties dominated by Pashtuns, are frequently at odds with Qanooni and the United Front's rule in the Lower House. This should create natural allegiances with the Pashtun Karzai. Indeed, many of Karzai's recent appointments to government positions appear designed to please constituencies in these two parties. However, his engagement with Pashtun nationalists seems more geared to shoring up support for his re-election and not for mobilizing support in parliament. HIA MP Mawlawi Ludin (Nangarhar, Pashtun) said while disappointed with many aspects of Karzai's rule, his party will likely support the president in next year's election. Afghan Millat members, too, seem likely to eventually fall into line behind Karzai's campaign despite rumors of that party's leaders entertaining presidential ambitions of their own. Still, political support from these parties has not translated into legislative success. With up to 100 MPs loosely tied to one or both of these two parties, Karzai should be able to better control the Lower House's agenda. However, most of these same MPs sided against him in the veto override votes, citing the supremacy of parliament's role in lawmaking over the necessity to support a fellow Pashtun president.

-- Wardak Loyalists. MPs critical of Karzai's relations with the legislative branch said about two dozen other MPs in

the Lower House receive financial support from Wardak's office. If true, this appears to be an unfocused strategy without clear legislative goals or an aim to create a reliable bloc of supporters. Many MPs allegedly receiving money from Wardak have rarely, if ever, banded together to promote or oppose legislation as a group. In a recent debate over income tax rates, many MPs supposedly taking handouts from Wardak's office voted against the president's position. Other named Wardak loyalists, such as Rahima Jamay (Herat, Tajik) or Jangul Kargar (Parwan, Pashtun), are openly critical of Karzai in conversations with us and say they will not support his re-election.

-- Republic and Republican Parties. Conspiracy theory enthusiasts frequently speak of a "Republic Party" headed by MPs Saima Khugyani (Nangarhar, Pashtun) and Abdul Qaum Sajadi (Ghazni, Hazara) that counts up to 40 MPs as members and requires a loyalty oath to Karzai as the price of membership. However, alleged supporters refused to discuss their allegiances with us. Press reports from last year do mention this party's formation, but others dismiss the Republic Party as a fleeting attempt by Karzai loyalists to organize support. Karzai advisor Sebghatullah Sanjar, head of the similarly named Republican Party, dismissed the Republic Party as a "ghost party" that sought and failed to co-opt his party's political turf. Although Sanjar's Republicans count no MPs among their ranks, he says the Republic Party is in a far weaker state and exists only on paper. Sanjar said Republican candidates would run on a pro-Karzai platform in the 2010 elections and support the president in next year's campaign, although they are highly critical of his current management style.

-- Third Line. Shortly after the National Assembly opened in 2005, the Lower House's small grouping of pro-Western democrats coalesced around Shukria Barakzai's (Kabul, Pashtun) Third Line movement. Although the more than

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25 MPs originally associated with this group positioned themselves as an alternative to Karzai and Qanooni, the bloc found itself frequently supporting the president's positions, especially as more conservative elements in the Lower House lashed out against Foreign Minister Spanta or sought to curtail personal freedoms guaranteed in the Constitution. Today, however, Barakzai said the party is down to 11 MPs, with the rest bought off by rival factions. Barakzai also claimed to oppose Karzai's re-election and said Third Line MPs always voted their conscience, with no thought to supporting, or opposing, Karzai's position.

-- Minor Parties and Influential Independents. Karzai also counts allies among the host of independents in parliament, many heading minor parties with minimal numbers of MPs. Jamil Karzai (Kabul, Pashtun), the president's cousin, heads the National Youth Solidarity Party, and while he is the sole member of his party in Parliament, routinely promotes Karzai to his fellow MPs. With no influential committee or leadership position in the Lower House, though, he more often plays the role of salesman than power broker. When Wardak and Karzai want influence, they often turn to Qanooni rival Ustad Rasoul Sayyaf (Kabul, Pashtun). But despite Sayyaf's prominent role in recent Afghan history, fewer than 10 MPs align with his Islamic Call party and he rarely attends Lower House sessions, making him an undependable floor leader for pro-government votes. Karzai's support in the Lower House took a further hit earlier this year when Mohammad Aref Noorzai (Kandahar, Pashtun), a leader among southern Pashtun MPs, lost his position as deputy speaker.

-- Ethnic Parties. Karzai maintains regular contact with ethnic minority parties, such as the various Hazara-led Hezb-e-Wahdat factions and the Uzbek-centric Junbesh-e-Milli, but rarely includes them in legislative strategies. Outreach to these groups is geared more for possible use in next

year's election, as Karzai seeks to build a coalition of supporters that will push him over 50 percent in the election's first round. Few Hazaras and even fewer Uzbeks show up on lists of MPs receiving support from Wardak's office. And Wardak rarely turns to these parties for support on legislation, more often finding these groups opposed to Karzai's increasingly Pashtun nominees. Uzbeks and Hazaras constituted most of the opposition to Attorney General Ishaq Aloko during last month's confirmation vote.

-- Meshrano Jirga (Upper House). The president finds more organized support in the less-powerful Upper House, where more than half of the members owe their positions to Karzai. Deputy Speaker Hamed Gailani (Paktia, Pashtun) and his Harmony Group of more than 50 MPs often back Karzai publicly, although Gailani is known to have his own presidential ambitions and frequently criticizes the president in private conversations with us. Pro-democratic Karzai appointees in the Upper House, like Rida Azimi (Parwan, Tajik), say they will support his re-election for lack of a better candidate, but rarely hear from Wardak's office on legislative issues.

#### Unbalanced View on Executive-Legislative Relationship

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16. (C) Wardak's view of the National Assembly as subservient to the executive branch may influence Karzai's inattention to parliament. Although the Constitution creates a US-style three-branch government with various checks and balances, Karzai's interpretation favors executive interference in parliament's operations. Shrinivas Sohoni, an Indian national and Asia Foundation employee advising Wardak on parliamentary affairs, said Karzai believes the president should set the Lower House's agenda, determine which bills come up for votes, set the ground rules for testimony by Cabinet members, and approve the National Assembly's budget and foreign travel of its members, similar to a parliamentary democracy system of government with Karzai as both president and prime minister. These positions put him at odds with most MPs, primarily Qanooni, and contribute to the poor relations between the two branches.

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17. (C) These fundamental disagreements over the nature of the legislative branch mean Karzai faces an uphill path in order to win even routine victories in the Lower House. Because the Constitution allows the president to issue decrees when Parliament is out of session, Karzai often waits out parliament and issues decrees to jump start his legislative priorities. The Constitution gives the Lower House the right to revisit any decree, but Qanooni faces his own organizational challenges and Karzai can rely on a loose confederation of sympathizers (quorums are difficult to achieve if just a few more MPsthan usual stay home) to foil his challenges with delaying tactics.

#### Politics Over Process Devalues Role of Parliament

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18. (C) Karzai's approach to parliament has been ineffective at best and alienating at worst. His inattention to organizing a more formal network of support among MPs exacerbates the "everyone is in it for themselves" attitude among many MPs. Wardak's limited outreach efforts may occasionally produce victories or stymie Qanooni's efforts, but they fall far short of a useful strategy to promote the government's business. Instead, Karzai's inconsistent relationship with MPs focuses more on electoral math than advancing a legislative agenda. This approach may get him through next year's presidential election, but it only weakens parliament as a pillar of Afghan democracy. The stalemate between a weakened parliament and a legislatively ineffective president will also not be able to resolve balance of power tensions between the two branches of

government.  
DELL